

## Could Slight Dampness Result In Bad Effect On Cowboy's Health?

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MERTZON — During the past spring roundup I began a study of what effect the weather has on the scattering of drovers remaining in this land the Indian chiefs once called the "Country of the Howling Braves." Primarily, I wanted to settle, once and for all, whether the hide of these dry-weather livestock handlers was as sensitive to moisture as they pretend it is. Of course it is bound to take a long time to arrive at the answer, considering how regularly this area is blessed with sunshine.

The first observation was made one morning when a half-inch shower fell as we were marking lambs. Since the operation was underway before the rain started, it was necessary to continue it even though the hands set up a howl about getting damp that would surpass the wailing of a championship team of Chinese mourners.

The complaining was normal. As anybody knows who has ever been within 10 country miles of sheep and cow wranglers, they are never satisfied with the weather. In summer, the heat anywhere from the southern tip of Florida to the snow line in the Canadian Rockies is regarded as unbearable by the cowhands who range this continent. Other seasons are cursed by the same parties as being either too windy, too calm, too wet or too dry.

Therefore, their attitude toward a scant quantity of cold rain trickling down their collars last spring was as much to be expected as it is for them to bellow and rage when the dust content of the atmosphere reaches a hazy five-mile visibility or closes into minimum six-inch limit.

(Note: Six-inch visibility is as thick as dust has ever been known to reach here in the shortgrass country.)

It seemed important to watch the men while the rain was falling and then, while undercover, as to any symptoms they developed after the superficial wetting. One waddie who had cut his milk teeth during the drouth of the '50s was given particular attention. If he should turn up with, say, the wet weather lumbago or Georgia dew poisoning without the older men showing signs of such rare disorders, then it would be worthwhile to devote full time to examining the prodigies of the great drouth to see if their susceptibility to water was lower than that of the average cowboy.

It was already known that these youngsters and their contemporaries showed indications of having a phobia against bathwater. So it seemed natural that somewhere deep in their makeup their problem might be linked to the dry plague that nearly took us all under a decade ago.

As the weeks passed and the work became tedious, it appeared that the youngster's chronic complaining about having been wet was beginning to diminish. But upon closer examination I discovered that he'd quit carrying on about the morning of wet chaps, soggy boots and the 18-mile north wind of that fateful morning, only to start bellyaching about the dust and heat during shearing.

As it stands now, no permanent damage appears to have resulted from the brief encounter with rainfall during lamb marking. There was possibly some ill effects to the subject's vocal chords resulting from the constant, vociferous complaining, but I could detect no sign of lasting infirmity.

Someday this study could have real meaning. The question of weather and health is bound to arise when the unions and Labor Department take over control of the working force. Until that time, I plan to continue watching to see whether there is a chance that rain could result in one of these chousers of stock and beaters of brush melting into a plate of Jello.